



NEWS

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SERVICE ISSUES FINAL 1996-97 WATERFOWL HUNTING FRAMEWORKS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently issued final regulatory frameworks for the 1996-97 waterfowl hunting season maintaining the increased season lengths and bag limits instituted last year in response to a strong rebound in duck populations.

Under the frameworks, states are allowed to choose a daily bag limit of up to five ducks except in the Pacific Flyway where the limit is seven ducks. As always, there are specific limits for individual species, such as black ducks, canvasbacks, and northern pintails, within the daily bag limits.

Season lengths for ducks can be up to 50 days in the Atlantic and Mississippi flyways, 60 days in the Central Flyway (83 days in the High Plains), and 93 days in the Pacific Flyway (100 days in the Columbia Basin).

Changes from last year include one additional duck to the Pacific Flyway daily bag limit and an additional redhead within the daily bag limit in the Central and Mississippi flyways. The frameworks also increase snow goose bag limits in the Atlantic Flyway and possession limits in the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central flyways in response to growing populations. In addition, many areas are now open for snow goose hunting until late February and early March.

Three consecutive years of good habitat conditions have boosted duck populations. Duck breeding populations climbed 5 percent this spring to the highest level since 1979 and the estimated fall flight will be nearly 90 million ducks, one of the highest on record. However, scaup, pintail and American wigeon remain below long-term averages.

Meanwhile, most goose and swan populations show continued health and seasons generally are unchanged from recent years. Because of low population levels, however, the season on migratory Canada geese in the Atlantic Flyway will remain closed for the second consecutive year.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the

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American people. The Service manages 511 national wildlife refuges encompassing 92 million acres, as well as 72 national fish hatcheries.

The agency also enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, stocks recreational fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with conservation efforts. It oversees the Federal Aid program that funnels Federal excise taxes on angling and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies. This program is a cornerstone of the Nation's wildlife management efforts, funding fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, shooting ranges, and related projects across America.